FAROOQ GUWAIDAH

A Thousand Faces Has The Moon

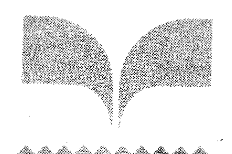
Poems

Translated from Arabic,
with an introduction
by

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Introduction

With two of his plays done into English, and many English versions of his lyrical poems anthologized, Farooq Guwaidah hardly needs an 'introduction'. This volume of verse, however, does : it is his fourteenth and latest (the first to be done almost wholly into English) and it represents the mature poet who has, over the last quarter of a century, established a tradition which is almost all his own. He is described as today's Arab world 'romantic' poet *par excellence,* as he has been swimming against the tide of 'Arab modernism' (and post-modernism) and vindicating the cult of feeling and plain language that has won him the hearts of millions. He alone has resisted the temptations of vagueness, pedantry, pretentiousness and preciosity, never departing from the genuine rhythms of Arabic verse in the name of innovation — a trap into which many (if not most) poets of the rising generation have fallen. To the 'professional critics' who seek complexities to unravel in each poem, regarding the poem

as an arena where they could show off their erudition and command of the modern critical idiom, he seemed too 'simple' — 'a man speaking to men', 'piping a simple song for thinking hearts', as Wordsworth would put it. He has been described as the Shelley of the Arab world, lacking in 'dialectical imagery' (Daiches' phrase) and tending more to self-expression than to the creation of abstruse intellectual constructs where a critic may discover 'things unknown' and 'let his fancy roam'. And a Shelley today, we have been told, would be basically against the 'spirit of the age' (a phrase coined by Hazlitt in characterizing Wordsworth's work) — insofar as the 'spirit' of our age is cynical, frivolous, and in stark opposition to the 'high seriousness' of the romantics.

Guwaidah's verse has been suffering from a critical sin worse than deprecation, namely the exclusion from the modern Arabic canon. He is not adequately admitted into Academia and seems to rely solely on popular support : over a million copies of his volumes of verse have been sold, and his 'collected poems' has been many times

reprinted. In a country where the 'canon' poet can expect to sell no more than a thousand copies, this is success indeed. It is exhilirating and reassuring : there is a place, after all, for poetry in today's world. And if the work of a successful poet does not answer to the definition of modernity as set out by the 'learned' Arab critics, then it is this definition that must be reconsidered, not the poetry.

The fact is, however, that Guwaidah's verse is modernist in a real rather than in a superficially technical sense. The vagueness of the modernists he shuns, it is true, but not the ambiguity. This feature alone could secure for him a place among the harbingers of the modern 'tone', the metaphysical poets of the early seventeenth century who had waited for two centuries to be rediscovered and vindicated by T.S. Eliot; but more of this later. Guwaidah's major characteristic, I believe, is his cumulative image- building techniques. This is, in effect, another way of describing the lack of 'dialectical' imagery in his verse. His method is cumulative because it is heuristic : he takes the reader along on a journey of

discovery, with the images building up, not circularly as in Shooshah, but linearly to a climax. Rather than the two poles of a dialectic, or the synthesis of thesis and antithesis, we embark in him on a journey of exploration through what could be described as imagery of possibilities : and the possibilities are endless. Sometimes they are resolved, a feature for which he has been censured, but often enough they are left open.

An example is the opening poem, from which the concluding lines are taken for the 'dedication'. It also carries the title of the volume which I have rendered literally as 'A thousand faces has the moon'. A first, or a superficial reading will tell us it is a love poem; but a more careful reading will reveal a deeper philosophical stance, apparently romantic but in effect quite modern. In the first reading we are lulled by the 'consecrated images' (to borrow C. Day-Lewis's phrase) — celestial and nature imagery — into concluding that it is a romantic love poem; in the second, we realize that the bewilderment at the true reality of the moon refers to the innate inability of

man to understand, or to make the least sense of, reality. The key to this is, of course, the very title of the poem as used in the body of the poem :

> I find myself absorbed
> In a thousand faces of the moon

The moon has too many faces (a 'thousand' is obviously metaphoric) and the image is sprung upon the reader unexpectedly, replacing the sun that has 'sprouted'. The subtle exchange between the face of the addressee and the sun is now called in question by the multiple faces of the moon. But as the key verb in the opening image — 'rise' تشرق — is compounded by an equally key verb — 'sprout' تنبت — higher reality represented by celestial light is opposed to earthly reality — 'on the banks' على ضفاف — and the common element, a life being born, is soon discerned. One is inevitably reminded of Bateson's interpretation of Wordsworth's stanza :

> A violet by a mossy stone,
> Half hidden from the eye;

Fair as a star when only one
Is shining in the sky

The opposition-based compound is then developed quietly through the changing faces of life implied in the cycle of the reasons, and the transference of the cosmic scene to the life of man. The autumn brings in the first paradox of the poem, and paradox has been described by the New Critics, led by Brooks, as the language of poetry : the tree leaves, dying, come to life and the bird announces the vernal pulse in the heart. It is precisely the type of 'romantic paradox' described by Brooks as characteristic of all good poetry; the 'sense of wonder' engendered by the feeling that the beloved is a life force, transforming the very face of nature, is consistently balanced by the poet's bewilderment at the uncertainty of the change. The joy of the 'budding days' is balanced by the 'tears' of the broken heart, just as the 'gentle breeze' at the opening of Wordsworth's *Prelude* turns into a 'tempest, a redundant energy, vexing its own creation'.

The paradox is maintained in the second part where more 'faces' appear to confuse and challenge the 'regular' logic of nature. The 'road [is] strewn' not with flowers but with 'thorny briars' which fill the air with 'fragrance' strong enough to effect a reunion. But the paradox is at work again, as the poet 'sinks' into a 'labyrinth' — into a puzzle, incapable of reconciling the conflicting faces of reality. The same pattern emerges, though the order is reversed, as the 'tempestuous winter' leads to, or changes into a 'love-making spring'. The sense of 'destiny' is given explicitly here as an expression of the inherent incomprehensibility of the situation : how could the 'nectar' not satisfy but rather lead to more 'yearning' — more 'thirst' ? What 'revives' the 'ruins of life' is not a love nectar, but a 'nectar of yearning'; and this is why it defies any logical explanation.

The transference of external reality to the life of man produces a set of paradoxical images *in terms of which* the theme is unfolded. Higher reality is not divorced from earthly life, and the echoes of correspondence multiply in

the poem. The central link is, however, *time* — not so much as an agent of change but as a manifestation of the unity of existence. If man could control time, which is impossible, as the poem seems to suggest, man could have a single face for reality; if the poet could believe himself when he declares that his addressee is 'time entire' he might hope, taking the 'road of passion', to reach 'the face of the moon' (a single face, that is). But this is immediately negated

> I wait to go with the clouds in vain
> Importune the days with a question :
> When will it even rain ?

He is, in other words, submitting to the reality of change and the impossibility of any reconciliation with time. The rain here is simply an indication of change, which now the poet accepts, only to wonder in the end at the reality of the *only* constant element in his (and human) life — the journey to an uncertain destination :

Is it our fate to drift in time,
Strangers, chasing a dream,
While life, you being my very lift-time,
Slips away, as the strangers
Remain, for ever, travellers ?

Far from being simply a love-ditty, the poem does appear on closer scrutiny to be a complex 'time poem'. The line of development within the paradoxical imagery reveals a unity of theme achieved through 'repeated attacks', to use critical jargon, rather than a single, straightforward dialectic. In the end we know that the lovers are both 'together' and 'apart'; if the beloved is the speaker's 'very life-time', then she must 'slip away' in time, and the key word here is 'strangers'. They may be strangers to one another or strangers to the times, but then they are united by their very alienation. They both travel together, destined to make a wilful effort, but they are equally powerless as they 'drift' along. Perhaps this is because they are 'chasing a dream'; and it can be a dream only in the sense of being an unrealized (unrealizable ?)

understanding (of life ? of reality ? of time ?) And insofar as it is unreal, the journey itself, as symbolic of man's endeavour to grasp the unity of reality, is doomed.

Perhaps we should never ask why the protagonist should be 'chasing a dream' : the reader accepts this as one of the *données* of the poem, a 'natural' element of his vision of time. But in Guwaidah the question of dream and reality is only deceptively ontological; the nature of time is no doubt questioned, but the relation between real and unreal pertains more significantly to the wedding in his imagination of time to the 'times'. If time is dealt with in the typical romantic poem at a primarily individual level (one inevitably thinks of Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* or the *Immortality Ode)* time in certain poems of the second generation of English romantics has definite social undertones. Often enough 'our time' comes to mean 'our times'; and the change attributed by Guwaidah to that inexplicable, inscrutable force connects the individual to the community and sees the one in the many, the many in one.

Interest in the reality of being is only faintly suggested by a major and paramount interest in the particular reality of his 'times' — the present situation in the Arab world, especially in Egypt, as seen from the double temporal perspective of past and present. Transferred to the individual poetic experience, the duality becomes one manifestation of his feeling of the multifaceted nature of his life. In some poems of this volume the poet unequivocably regards the past as real, the present as unreal. In his *Letter to Saladdin* he forcefully recreates the past glory of his nation as a present reality in his mind, while the present — too blurred and hazy to be regarded as real — floats in images of 'dogs', 'worms', 'ravens', and 'locusts'. His nation is now

> An emaciated body,
> In tenebrific frost,
> Shroudless on the cross !

What he sees about him is a travesty of reality; it cannot be accepted

How humiliating it is if
That sword of glory drawn
Should turn into a decoration !

And holding the sword, Saladdin is seen as the reality, though displaced for the moment :

How humiliating it is if Saladdin,
Now from Jerusalem banished,
Should seek in vain
A family lost, a house lost,
A homeland lost, and power lost !

The tone of the poem is sometimes strident, leaving no room for ambivalence or the least equivocation; but the central poetic technique here is the superb paradox of past *as* present, channelled through the underlying questioning of reality.

Not so strident is the tone of *Two Faces in the Mirror*. From the start a paradox is created : the mirror reflects two faces, not the 'mirror image' of a single face. They obviously belong to the protagonist and his beloved, now

trying to face a *present reality* and shed 'all yesterday's memories'. But soon the speaker discovers that the image in the mirror, by definition a reverse image, is not 'present' but 'past' :

> That face I know full well,
> The lineaments in my heart
> Engraved, each reflects a day past.

The first line in this quotation is certainly reminiscent of Eliot's *Waste Land*, especially the implication that the 'throng' (Eliot's 'crowd') lacked real life — 'a multitude we call human'. But the suggestion is quickly modified as the romantic strain in the poet, with his inveterate faith in the power of love, enables the protagonist to overcome the multitude of 'mummified ghosts' by recalling the image of his beloved in romantic terms and almost in Wordsworthian language :

> These faces I did see and know
> As everybody passed in silence,
> But then you flashed in my eye

> As a white butterfly,
> Wafted by the wind,
> Into the rainy sky !

The image of the beloved first 'flashes', then 'wanes' then becomes a 'flicker'; it is obviously real enough to assure the poet of his belonging in time, inasmuch as such a belonging can secure the sense of reality he is seeking. Eliot is recalled again, and is again modified

> The flicker fades in the mirror,
> And a thousand faces float on the river,
> So unseemly, and among the ghosts
> I myself am lost.

We learn, as the tale unfolds in the poem, that the protagonist's beloved 'was forcibly jailed / And finally broken'. We are not told much more, but we may glean from the final 'fade away' (after flash, wane and flicker) that the face in the mirror was only a projection from the past, that what the poet initially saw was a vision which, for the purposes of the poem, was real enough for him.

Opposition to bleak realities may in Guwaidah make them unreal. Using his typical cumulative image-making technique, the poet may begin with an image of surviving power, as he does in *Such Rainless Clouds*, modifying it in the course of the poem with images from external reality that are horrifying in their abject implications, repeating from time to time a line ('I love you') that sounds like a genuine counterpart (being genuinely *real*) to the surrounding 'unreal' realities. The opening image of the wild, unbroken stallion leads in this poem to 'caravans of chagrin', 'marching up and down', with a 'fountain of green blood gushing'. We proceed to hear of the ghosts that get drunk on the 'Nile blood', then suddenly a question to the protagonist's beloved rocks the scene : the image of blood, not green this time, becomes dominant :

Oh, tell me how should morning come
And the beautiful times return
When you and I are but a cloud
That floats on high o'er homeland hills
Where it can see no daffodils !

Where could the dream be found
When shadows are dancing all round
And in our blood
The arrows of tyranny dive,
The blades of correction thive ?

The symmetrical structure of each question, both rhetorical, of course, is deliberate : the technique here is the well known Wordsworthian 'incremental repetition'. The repetition does not, however, simply *add* details to the image; it rather amplifies the sordidness of the reality portrayed. The first image of the abject reality rejected is a conscious parody of Wordsworth's famous lines in 'Daffodills' — a quiet ironical comment. The second, however, evokes a sense of Gothic horror, the cult of violence in today's world. The rising tempo continues to rise in a calculated crescendo that combines the ironic tone (by definition a modernist feature) with a horrific image of the human condition. Needless to say, the symmetrical structure of the questions is maintained :

How could that morning rise
When the bleak night likes
To saunter in our bleeding eyes ?
How could we have a sunrise
When the executioner
Is in the children's nursery
Teaching them who must be killer
And who must victim be ?

The repetition of 'I love you' serves as a thematic 'marker', directing the attention of the reader to the inherent irony of the situation. Repetition is not confined, in fact, to single lines or images or, indeed, structures : it seems to serve as a *theme* in itself. Strange as this may seem, the cumulative image-building pattern comes in the course of the volume to represent a vision, a specific way of looking at things. It is, of course, a technical device; but it has significance, and insofar as every *signification* is meaning, it becomes thematic. To cut down the repetition, to trim down the verse, as some critics have suggested, is to do violence not only to the typical Guwaidah technique

but to the substance of a central theme in his work — the post-modernist world is *repeating itself,* as the frequent use of the word 'boredom' implies. The early poet had another function for repetition to which I once referred in my introduction to *An Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry in Egypt* as 'rhythmic' and, occasionally, 'incantatory'. The device develops in the mature poet to become intrinsic to the poetic meaning, as clearly shown in *Etchings on the Face of the Wind.*

The poem opens with the repetition of three negatives — 'colourless' بلا ألوان, 'without walls' بلا جدران and 'shore-free' بلا شطآن — all rhyming, all plural. Now the repetition functions here to contrast the absence of colour, a far from commendable quality, with the absence of walls, as a sign of freedom, and the separation from the shore which, for the pearl, could mean either freedom or alienation. Unfortunately the repetition of the negative article to give divergent meanings in spite of parallel structures is peculiar to Arabic, and the ambiguity produced by the

repetition is lost in the translation. The meaning is, however, retained :

> We sat down to paint our dreams
> In a colourless time;
> On the face of the wind
> We painted two birds
> In a nest without walls;
> The nest now looked
> In the willow-tree bower
> As a shore-free pearl.

Now the opening two lines are repeated in each part of the poem, that is five times, not so much to create any rhythmic effect (which may be phonological) but rather to negate the past tense of the main verb; it is as though the initial moment were timeless. Some critics have argued that this belongs to the typical romantic technique of 'repeated attacks'; and they may be right, but here it assumes the additional dimension of calling in question the reality of time. The second part opens with the same

two lines followed by 'We recreated a past'; the third gives the following variation :

> But in our innocence
> We reckoned not that the pagan realm
> Worshipped in a temple of injustice

but the fourth has :

> And became one :
> We had no country wherein to belong,
> And, scattered, turned into a song.

while the last, for all the decisive grammar of the verbs, confirms the timelessness of the moment of revelation :

> The figures that the hand of tyranny
> On my face had painted
> Now vanished
> And the image of man remained.

It is a revelation in so far as it reverses the order of dream and reality : the dream painted now corresponds to the *real* image of man that *remains*, that is, which had been

kept intact in spite of the spurious figures scrawled by the 'hand of tyranny'. In a firm act of volition, even though you call it a dream, man can conquer the ruthlessness of time and the times.

Now I have suggested at the outset (in the third paragraph) that ambiguity could secure for Guwaidah a place among the harbingers of the modern 'tone', the English 'metaphysical' poets of the seventeenth century. So far I have dealt, however, with certain technical aspects in a handful of poems which are typical of Farooq Guwaidah, and have shown, clearly enough I hope, that they are inextricably linked up with his peculiar poetic vision. Ambiguity is one such technical device : Empson's 'Seven types' share the common element of being both structural and thematic, and this is true of Guwaidah's 'types'. Consider the 'morning scene' portrayed by the poet in *A Song far the Homeland* :

> Does any ray of morning light
> Linger in the eye of homeland bright ?
> The sun is gathering his broken beams

And the homeless morn
Is the ashes of a saint
Looking for an urn

A first reading will conclude that, yes indeed, this is a 'metaphysical' conceit, adequately far-fetched and complex but perhaps, not ambiguous. The second reading will show that it is the ambiguity that accounts for those very features. Is what we have here a 'morning scene' in any usual sense ? What can the third line mean ? Is the sun 'gathering' the 'relics' (ashes) of dead light ? ('When the lamp is broken / The light in the dust / Lies dead', Shelley) Or is the sun 'regrouping' the defeated beams (broken) for a counterattack ? Or is the sun not rising at all, but setting, or struggling to save its beams from occlusion (by the clouds, by the dust etc.) ? Line 4 tells us it is morning, though homeless; but where should morning have a house? In the eyes of homeland ? Does the morning live in the bright eyes of homeland ? If dead and already cremated, then it is the ashes that are homeless, 'looking for an urn' ! The opening two lines, however, question not

the survival of the morning, but whether any rays of its light could be seen 'in the eyes of homeland'. 'In the eyes' ? Perhaps to be *seen* rather than to be radiated by the eyes ? That the morning should be a saint is understandable, but why should the saint be 'uncoffined' (Byron's word) ? The questions proliferate only to confirm the central paradox and establish the ambiguity essential to the poetic vision of the poet : any simplification will involve individual interpretation which, the deconstructionists have taught, will only destroy that vision.

The ambiguity is not resolved but rather maintained in the second sentence :

In the wastes of bastard times
The Nile totters along
On two disabled feet, broken,
Looks around in boredom
In search of a home.

The Nile is 'homeless' too, then, like the morning ! The new image is no doubt easier to grasp, but what is the

connection between the vagrancy of the Nile and the homelessness of the morning ? Even the ashes of the saint are, as we have seen, homeless ! It all has to do, one may say, with the sense of alienation and the feeling that the life-giving force is astray — be it the light, the Nile or, at a certain spiritual level, the saint; but what are the 'wastes of bastard times' ?

Common modern methods of imagery analysis will be helpless to explain away the difficulties :are the 'wastes' created by the illegitimate nature of the 'times' (whatever that might mean) or are those 'times' themselves 'wastes' ? Formally, according to Christine Brooke-Rose, this is a genetival metaphor where the genetive is modified by whatever is added to it which thus functions as tenor in the tenor-vehicle nexus; and, formally, the latter meaning should be the one 'intended' (or to be inferred). But can the 'wastes' not refer also to the actual land in which the Nile 'totters' ? The ambiguity is confirmed by the succeeding image :

He begs for dreams in the throng,
Wondering in his dire straits,
'Which one of us has changed —
'The face of the land, or the face of the times ?'

In modern critical parlance the image should be regarded as both periphor, where a tenor is transmitted through a vehicle, and a diaphor, where both tenor and vehicle are interchangeable. As for the possible meaning of the 'bastard' times, it must remain anybody's guess, inasmuch as the 'times' could mean 'our present life', political, social, cultural, economic or otherwise; and the legitimacy is no less problematic, and is best left at that.

As a structural device, repetition is helped by the initial ambiguity. Three of the remaining six parts of the poem begin with the same rhetorical question, with each introducing variations on the main theme to open up the possibilities of meaning endlessly. The initial questions, repeated in part II, are followed by a variety of images of 'stifled' life :

On the banks of this ancient river
Sunlight is dying;
All warblers now are mute and
The trees engaged in self-slaughter.
The morning light is stifled
In the eyes of the young;
The moon's face has been torn asunder;
To slavery were sold the robes of the river,
And the sound of rain is smothered.

'Dying', 'mute', 'self-slaughter', 'stifled' and 'smothered' are no doubt variations on the theme of devastation : but the scene is a totally stilled picture. Even the trees killing themselves must be doing that quietly and, of course, without moving. There are no verbs of action, only the auxiliary 'to be', even when there is a suggestion of action by a noun such as 'rain' (as John Ellis has recently shown in his discussion of Chomsky in *Language, Thought and Logic,* 1993). There *is* life here, but it is repressed : the implication is that there are forces behind this state of affairs which are left undefined. The Arabic supplies a

subject for these implied forces — 'they', though who 'they' might be is left to the reader to infer.

It is this kind of ambiguity that makes the repetition thematic as well as technical. For the repeated opening lines in part III are followed by a series of verbs in the imperative (commands) asking the listener (or the reader who is presumably a compatriot) to consider how futile it is for any action to be taken in this situation

> Ask the steeds to slow down :
> The knights are caught in ambush
> After ambush;
> Ask the seagulls not to rush :
> The storm-struck gallies are all aground !
> Tell the birds that the death visor
> Hides a sniper
> Wandering all round !

In part IV the repeated opening lines lead to another version of devastation — emptiness. The river now 'chases a phantom', 'nothing may be seen / on these banks

in ruins', with the exception of a dead 'white butterfly' (the poet's private image of love) 'besieged by nothingness'. In part V the two central opening lines are not repeated : there is, instead, a return to the 'substance' of the 'morning scene' with slight modifications as though to resolve the ambiguity; but the ambiguity persists :

> What should remain
> Of the ashes of the morn
> Save the disjointed gangs of ugly night,
> Still at large, roaming about
> In the face of time ?

Now 'the ashes of the morn' takes us right back to the 'ashes of the saint' — though, strangely, the poet still asks what should remain of these 'remains' ! The typical structure of the ambiguous image (the genitival) is again there to maintain the unidentified character of those evil forces behind such a devastation. The mention of the night encourages us to read the 'face of time' in temporal terms; but the suggestion of the 'times' is never for off.

Of the last two parts little need be said : they address the night, then the Nile, the first in a Shelley-modelled apostrophe, the second in a feigned address to royalty. Strange metaphors here bring in a different kind of ambiguity, and a few examples should, I am sure, be enough :

Do let the day
And morning light play
On the necks of gardens !
....
Do let the dream-caravan
Once again anchor in the eye
Of every man !

* * * * *

I have dwelt so far on the peculiar (and essential) qualities of Guwaidah's work which single him out as a romantic modernist whose 'imagery of possibilities' secures a place for him among the neo-metaphysicals of

our age. Those features I have discussed because I could, up to a point, reproduce them in translation. What I could never reproduce, never hope to emulate, are the beautiful Arabic rhythms of his verse : I have done my best, of course, to find English equivalents for the rhythms and rhyme-schemes, but the original's charm is haunting and, alas ! can only be adumberated in English. Trying to be faithful to the 'sense' and to the 'poetic meaning' at once is never an easy job; but, whenever a conflict arose, I opted for the first without the least hesitation. I have taken the liberty to omit two poems from this English version of the Arabic volume, namely 'these was a night which we shared' and 'when will you come', because I have found the idiom in both to be fraught with specific cultural nuances which might probably suffer too much in the translation. This is, of course, another way of saying that I found them too difficult to do into English ! The ten translated poems are given in the order of the published volume, with two gaps left for the omitted ones.

As the introduction has shown, Guwaidah is a difficult poet to interpret, hence to translate. I have therefore taken great care to reduce the interpretation to a minimum, opting for the most obvious sense. My intervention, for the sake of rhyme or rhythm, has been negligible, consisting mainly in structural tricks without doing violence to the original. I have not allowed myself to the tempted by an attractive rhyme word to add or detract from the meaning; and I believe that, for better or for worse, the present English version faithfully represents Farooq Guwaidah or, to be severely accurate, Farooq Guwaidah as I understood and enjoyed him. Any faults in the English version are therefore mine and I fully answer for them.

M. Enani
Cairo, 1997



Dedication

Is it our fate to drift in time,
Strangers, chasing a dream,
While life, you being my very life-time,
Slips away, as the strangers
Remain, for ever, travellers ?



The Poems



A Thousand Faces Has the Moon

Year after year you rise
On the banks of my life,
And a sun sprouts
In the darkness of the universe,
I find myself absorbed
In a thousand faces of the moon.
Year after year you rise
In the autumn of my heart,
Now a bird sings in my eyes
Now in my blood a tuneful pulse beats,
And a crazy longing weaves
Such garlands of tree leaves.
Year after year you rise
A white butterfly
On budding days
Fluttering, dancing on the wings
Of flowers ! And every year you rise
In my heart, a tumultuous passion,

The tears of a heart dissolving
And totally broken !

* * *

Year after year,
To me you do appear
A destiny — a road strewn
With thorny briars;
The wing of the wind
Now carries me to you
With fragrance drunk,
But then I find myself stranded, and
In a labyrinth sunk.
Year after year
You ravage my life
As a tempestuous winter
But heal it at once
As a love-making spring,
A melodious quiver

Of a fiddle string !
Year after year
You come to me, as a destiny,
A season of thrill,
When birds in a covey
Throng to the rill,
When the eyes of palm trees
In the early hour dim
Drink light to the brim,
With the nectar of yearning
The ruins of life reviving !

* * *

Year after year
I waited for a change of season;
You may come and depart,
Leaving a heart,
Torn apart,
A prey to despondency

And dire uncertainty !
Year after year
My passion would take me to you,
Where in your eyes still
I could dream my time away,
Then the ghosts of an imminent farewell,
Breaking the silence of our unity,
Split the ONE we'd come to be !

* * *

You're all the seasons combined,
While I, a stranger on a pilgrimage,
Carrying passion for my luggage,
Soon reach your gate
And patiently wait !
You're Time entire,
While I, a traveller
In season after season,
Take the road of passion,

Nostalgia-drawn,
To the face of the moon !
I wait to go with clouds in vain,
Importune the days with a question :
When will it ever rain ?
Is it our fate to drift in time,
Strangers, chasing a dream,
While life, you being my very life-time,
Slips away, as the strangers
Remain, for ever, travellers ?



Etchings on the Face of the Wind

We sat down to paint our dreams
In a colourless time;
On the face of the wind
We painted two birds
In a nest without walls;
The nest now looked
In the willow-tree bower
As a shore-free pearl
Both name and birthplace forgotten,
No addresses written,
We tore up the books of yesterday,
And did all anguish jettison,
On the distant shores of oblivion !
No more will grief, we said, be here,
As joy in our eyes crawled,
A babe to parents dear !
On thirsty lips we painted love,
The colour of desire and deprivation.

I painted you as a star
On my horizon,
The farther it went, the bigger it grew :
I saw her everywhere !
I painted you in the eye of the sun,
A forest alive with a river of passion,
Flowing through, a crown,
An oasis of love, located
Within me, though there I dwelt,
Where both hearts, requieted,
Thought and felt.

* * *

We sat down to paint our dreams
In a colourless time;
We recreated a past
A point in time that was
When monster night
Behind us stalked,

With the rising roar of the flood !
The cups of sorrow we sipped
Were adulterated with the blood
Of oppression and flasehood;
Many times did we die,
Uncoffined though, untombed !
And people had faces
That looked like ours,
Their features — our features,
But each face was now two faces
The one was lost in a country
Where mice ruled supreme,
The other remained a prisoner within
A cell without bars.

* * *

We sat down to paint our dreams
In a colourless time;
But in our innocence,

We reckoned not that the pagan realm
Worshipped in a temple of injustice,
Wreaked havoc in Satan's province !
We forgot in our innocence
The faces that taught us
To kill, even as we were little,
Feeding the kittens at home,
Enchanted by the nightingale !
We forgot in our innocence
The faces that chased with the lethal
Crossbow the seagull flocks
And choked with fatal silence
All fiddle strings !
We forgot in our innocence
The country that planted cactus
In babies' milk
And fed the sparrow
To the crow !

* * *

We sat down to paint our dreams
In a colourless time;
And became one
We had no country wherein to belong;
And, scattered, turned into a song
In every corner of the earth
Sung by every tongue.
I love you, said I to the dawn
As now to me it rose
With an embrace that did pull down
The walls all round.
I love you, said I to the sea,
To the waves as shoreward they took me !
I love you, said I to the night,
To the moments in their flight,
Wishing that once again
We were the same children
Who had to the winds given
The mangled limbs of crowns,
Opting now for a bargain

Where a time is bought
By falsehood or mendacity unburdened,
By the colour of sorrow untainted,
And a homeland is bought
With no oppression tormented,
By quacks and jailers undented.

* * *

We sat down to paint our dreams
In a colourless time;
The figures that the hand of tyranny
On my face had painted
Now vanished miraculously
And the image of man remained.

A Song for the Homeland

Does any ray of morning light
Linger in the eye of homeland bright ?
The sun is gathering his broken beams,
And the homeless morn
Is the ashes of a saint
Looking for an urn.
In the wastes of bastard times
The Nile totters along,
On two disabled feet, broken,
Looks around in boredom
In search of a home,
He begs for dreams in the throng,
Wondering, in his dire straits,
'Which one of us has changed —
'The face of the land, or the face of the times' ?
The river is sundered, day by day,
In panic the eyes are running away,
The fragments of a nose fall down visibly,

The mouth, imprisoned,
Is all in ruins,
The howling winds now rock the body,
Two feeble feet, a stomach
The hand in irons,
The sword is dumb :
The bidding was nought
In latter day's auction.
But the Nile is now in rebellion,
In the face of ugliness,
Of preciosity and rottenness.

* * *

Does any ray of morning light
Linger in the eye of homeland bright ?
On the banks of this ancient river
Sunlight is dying
All warblers now are mute,
The trees engaged in self-slaughter.

The morning light is stifled
In the eyes of the young,
The moon's face has been torn asunder;
To slavery were sold the robes of the river,
And the sound of rain is smothered.
Wherever you went
The face of a serpent,
The colour of death, was there,
Squirting out venom among the ditches.
In every eye the face of an executioner
Appears and vanishes
But now, returning, roars
In destiny-high pitches.
On the street corners
The glories of green years
Are crucified;
All the honours conferred
By virgin Times are cold —
Life, territory and people
Are ceded !

I wonder if you've seen
How every baby here is born
And in his mouth a stone !
Nothing is left for the birds
On the Nile banks save sorrow
Ravaging the regions of the heart;
The time of the pretty sparrow
Is gone ! The river is ruled
By beaks of prey !
The age of master pirates peeps
From every melancholy eye,
In the dream extinguished
And the features so wretched.

* * *

Does any ray of morning light
Linger in the eye of homeland bright ?
The age of cavaliers is gone !
Ask the steeds to slow down,

The knights are caught in ambush
After ambush,
Ask the seagulls not to rush,
The storm-struck gallies are all aground !
Tell the birds that the death visor
Hides a sniper
Wandering all round !
Woe unto the river water when,
Flowing submissively,
In panic it makes peace, docilely !

* * *

Does any ray of morning light
Linger in the eye of homeland bright ?
Incarcerated, the river now chases
A phantom — a dream in flight
Screaming in fright !
Nothing may now be seen
On these banks in ruins

Except a broken-hearted bird
That sang in vain.
In the kindergarten, there was
A single white butterfly, dead,
Besieged by nothingness !
Only the battalions of old ignorance
Slyly looked on and laughed,
Though bored;
Who has to the long night sold
Our eyes and muted the word within,
Violating the pen
With the edge of the sword ?

* * *

What should remain
When the river is dead,
Save that tree, pallid
And uncoffined ?
What should remain

When the dawn is killed
Save that black cloud
Crying over the ruined homeland ?
What should remain
Of the ashes of the morn,
Save the disjointed gangs of ugly night
Still at large, roaming about
In the face of time ?

* * *

O night lengthening !
Do let the day
And morning light play
On the necks of gardens !
Do plant lush corn
And pull the scaffolding down
In our hometown
Where every house is a pavilion !
Do let Justice return

With a head held high
In the light of banners !
Do let the seagulls, now muted,
Once again sing in the sky;
Unchased by hunters' rifles !
Do let the dream-caravan
Once again anchor in the eye
Of every man !
Do let the word once again
Be free, for ever unfettered,
Not fearing the whip or prison !

* * *

Dear royal river
I have long been a courtier,
But my resignation
Now I tender !
No longer can I sing
In jails of oppression

And endless night !
No longer can I play
A caged nightingale,
Or a vanquished knight
Seeking an impossible dream !
The tears of the Nile
Are there still in my eye,
Blood that cannot dry,
Though flowing not !
And I declare hereby
That the times of vagrancy
Have my voice silenced,
That the steeds were dead
When the neighing was stifled !
O river majestical
If you once again could flow
As king, towering high,
You will be the Nile I know,
Possessing my eye !



A Song For Departure

Come bid farewell to a phantom, hope-spun,
And draw that final curtain down;
How hard it is to watch a parting sun,
How bleeds my heart for a day now gone !
But time is cruel
Does ruthlessly throttle
All hope, though little !
Oh come, let's try and pick those pieces,
The fragments of a life-time scattered, —
The tales of nights, too short and battered.
With love we spent a life so pretty
But at the end of the road
Loomed a high wall broad,
Why should hope play havoc within
Deceiving us with a false grin ?
Why should we follow the stars in the sky,
Seeing how they go astray !
But love which we once bore as a baby

Watched how it grew to tyranny,
In each vein and artery,
Now whilst you're away,
Grows old and melancholy,
And still gives way
To anguish and devastation !
Oh, tell me, you unfathered vision,
Quivering in every mind,
Where could you find,
The light in your eyes shining
When all inside is dim and pining ?
How can we the sweet life regain
When all we can is wait in pain ?
Wonder not if the winter snow
Falls on two hearts, too dusty grown,
Nor feel so sad if frost should come,
Nor ask which way this life does turn :
You simply were a brightening morn,
A hurtless lustre
And a burning fire !

Swimming Still in Your Eyes

A long subterranean tunnel
My life to me does seem,
A fearful passageway, rising,
Falling, then wearily winding;
The light of the dream at the end
Makes it look short and tempting :
Drawn are we then by the tidal
Wave of the impossible,
Only to realize how the vision
Has been a mirage, unattainable.
In sorrow, with bodies too feeble
To struggle on, we return.
The feet of pedestrians fall down,
Heavily, helplessly undone,
And the roads groan under the burden.
Each head was a smashed crown,
With the bodies jostling, fighting,
While the throats, oppressed,

Were addicted to wailing.
The eyes, now drained,
Were dry river-beds cracked,
Branches that, crying, bled,
And streams nursing the palm trees with sorrow;
The faces were damaged sails,
Comforting one another,
And shores crying over
The ruins of our river.

* * *

A long subterranean tunnel
My life to me does seem
From the dawn of innocence sprung,
From the virgin morning
And a face so charming,
Cutting across the times of idleness,
The broken soul and sickly hope.
A light in the tunnel burning, your eyes

Are a morning recklessness,
Still undaunted, still resisting
Nocturnal endlessness !
Swimming still in your eyes
Though the waves are hurricane-driven
And the howling wind bespeaks
The terror of hungry beasts,
And the ship's sail, broken,
Helplessly seeks a guide.
It was then that you and I,
By a virgin moment united,
Though fading behind
Departure knell,
Peeped all round in vain :
In boredom all days tottered along,
While feebly pulsed the rays of the sun,
And on the horizon
The violet hour was moaning.
Are dreams now held so cheap
While the years weightlessly creep ?

Has the world floundered in the deep,
Lured by the promise of an impossible dream ?
Barely two steps separate us
But sorrow looms
And 'tis a thousand-mile abyss

* * *

A long subterranean tunnel
My life to me does seem;
Addicted am I to the joy
In your eyes — a little girl playing
With the morning light of a holiday !
I love you, though dawn appears
At the end of the tunnel
Farther and farther away !
I love you,
Though a dark melancholy hue
Does our meeting overshadow
A black spot in a dress so new !

I love you
Though now the sun, both light and fire,
May in the ice expire !
I love you though love sometimes may
Turn to death in each breast
Or emerge in tearful joy —
A new-born baby's cry !
I love you though you may
At once prove
Both heaven and hell,
A vernal grove,
A bitter autumn,
And a homeless hope !
I love you though I know
How now I sold all virgin nights
In the slave market !
I love you though you be
A crazy night to me,
And I, a lost and unknown moment,
Am a pain, griping, persistent !

I love you though in your eye
I seem a killer,
But in my eye
Perhaps a martyr !

* * *

A long subterranean tunnel
My life to me does seem
The seagulls issue in the morning
A drunken scream
When the face of the sun appears
Melting all life's chagrin
Allowing the stallion
To neigh again !
I love you,
I care not if our paths met,
If the days still carried us
To the impossible dream,
Or if the road so taken

Spanned my whole life-time
I shall still travel
In your eyes' mystery,
Never too weary to make the journey
Never too weary.



Two Faces in the Mirror

Two faces meet in the mirror;
Gone are all yesterday's memories.
Out of the eyes all images fall down.
The two faces in the throng draw near,
They smile, come closer but tremble in fear.
One should still be wary.
That face I know full well
The lineaments in my heart
Engraved, each reflects a day past.
The people about me, a dense crowd,
A black, thickening cloud,
Moved in heaps, though scattered,
A multitude we call 'human'
Mummified ghosts fill the horizon
For ever roaming,
With the empty cups of a lifetime,
With pallid songs,
Little hopes lost,

And quivers on the old strings !
These faces I did see and know
As everybody passed in silence,
But then you flashed in my eye
As a white butterfly,
Wafted by the wind
Into the rainy sky !

* * *

The two faces in the mirror
Drift apart, torn out like the leaves
Pulled out from the trees
By autumnal power !
The face now wanes in the tumult
With me rushing in pursuit,
But the eyes of the multitude
Are memorial ruins of a lifetime lost :
Some have opted for a sell-out,
Others have lost heart

And some betrayed.
The flicker fades in the mirror
And a thousand faces float on the river
So unseemly, and among the ghosts
I myself am lost,
Watched by blind smiles
By boredom scattered,
I pause in the crowd and wonder
In the silence of my soul
Who could've stolen the moon ?
She was here minutes ago
Suffusing each eye with lustre,
Alive with the hymns of dawn !
She was here in the mirror
Infusing my eyes
With a thousand vernal colours
And a thousand hues of flowers !

* * *

I seek your face in the crowd,
Knowing that that one face
A thousand mysteries hides,
The tears of waves departing
The glint of a pearl quivering
With things unspoken
As she was forcibly jailed
And, finally, broken.

* * *

The face in the mirror
Appears but fades away
In the failing light;
I try again but
Now fails my sight !
In the mirror my face is on the cross
Though still staring
At the other faces, waiting.
O departed moon, where are you now ?

Who is it now that tempts you
To keep your nightly vigil ?
Your face is lost in the crowd;
Who was it that tempted that pearl
Suddenly to travel ?
The two faces come together
Then spring apart;
My face is again split in two,
And the two come close once more
In the mirror
They meet and merge in one,
Smiling, though cautiously, to time;
For in the eyes of night
I still see ghosts
Such as we call 'human'.
Those before you are gone
No trace of anyone !
Your face and mine remain
And all that was done
Is now undone !



Like a Seagull

Just like a seagull
At night fall
I find myself lifted once more
By an air current of melancholy,
Nostalgia-driven, to the farthest shore !
And like that bird
Am often in love with the shingles,
The melody of the wind,
And unruly waves.
Like a seagull, too,
My utmost joy is to go to sleep,
Only when the eyes of dawn do peep,
Or, with the children, play
On a beaming holiday !

* * *

Just like a seagull
I see nothing ahead

Except a horizon,
Not knowing, nor wanting to know, how vast !
And like a seagull
I like not a coastal cyclone,
A prison of oppression,
Or the easy bread of slavish existence !
And like that bird
I would not live at mountain feet
Or have a love in the heart of darkness
Or meet with death in icy silence.

* * *

Just like a seagull
My moments I cull
From the lips of time
And seek the thrill
Of a virgin joy
In a bubbling rhyme !
And like a seagull

For ecstasy I quake
As the waves on the shore
So passionately break
They do intoxicate
And I make them inebriate
Still calling for more !
And just like that bird
The desire in my heart
Is but a little abated
The light shouts loud
Jerking me to wakefulness
And a new-born countenance !
Like the seagul
I long for a heart's embrace
There dropping my weariness
And folding up the plight
Of time's slothfulness !

* * *

Just like a seagull
I do not soar in the dark
I do not like departing caravans
In the vagrant night;
And just like that bird,
I do not fear the waves
When they rise in my face
Splitting me in twain,
Appearing in the nocturnal blackness
As an obstinate fate !
Just like a seagull,
I do not like orchards denuded,
Opting for the fruit-trees full,
And my head is melody-tuned
To the glimmering thrill
And the homeless waves.
And like that bird
I am never so weary
Of a long journey;
I may doze off a while

But never fail
To wake up instantly
And again unfurl my sail !

* * *

How long have I wondered
What should remain
If the morning eyes are extinguished,
And the heart's candles are throttled,
And the seawave ribs are broken
In excruciating pain ?
Nothing will remain !
For, when the wing is broken,
The beams of the sun
Melt away,
The beatings of the heart are becalmed;
And in the silence
The ice maintains a frozen existence.
Nothing should remain

Save the voice of the wind
That carries some of my feathers
On the evening wing,
Then takes them again
To the distant shore.
My ship I give once more
To the winds blowing amain,
And sink in my sea of troubles
Drawn by the rhythmic silence.
Behind the horizon
I turn into a seagull memory
Who once sang in ecstasy!
If all the seagulls will,
For an hour before they go
Sing a lovely melody,
Time will only hear
The tune it wants to hear!

A Letter to Saladdin

Dear sir,
I must at first admit
That the mad horse, bolting,
Has lost his race;
That roguish times' mire,
On our heads falling,
Has taken the place of crowns
And regal attire;
At the helm are people who look like men,
But then this age belongs to children.
I further must admit, dear sir,
That verse cannot compare
With a dance in court, performed
By a belly dancer !
How can a beautiful butterfly
Defy the sneaking serpent sly :
When rats are in power,
The lions of sorrow die;

The big brokers have grown so beastly,
Sold out their peoples,
Causing their dreams to miscarry.
In all humility, dear sir,
I now state that I, honouring my word,
Have seen others betray,
Have given the sap of my life away,
To help engender a new break of day;
Though the cowardly times
Have played me false
I offered my prime as a sacrifice
At the altar of idols
Who publicly sold their slanders
In the realm of the devil;
That I gave away
My youthful day of joy
In the age of slave-trading and ignominy;
Let me, dear sir, admit, finally,
That in this race
I have lost a whole lifetime, no less,

So that I carry a human face
But am quite 'humanless'.

* * *

For beloved Jerusalem I sang
The sweetest tunes;
The echoes of my verse rang,
Reverberating, from minaret tops
And church spires to garden paths.
Jerusalem does paint
The face of our prophet,
With angels attending,
And the whole universe
Reciting holy Quranic verses.
In the distant horizon
Jerusalem looks on
With the shadow of christ extending
Surrounded by a monk-ring.
But the city is in mourning

An extinguished lantern
Without pulse, without colour,
But cries her heart out when
Dawn prayers draw near,
When morning eyes peer
And the *muezzin*
Calls the faithful to prayer.
Jerusalem is wondering
How her own son did turn
Into a broker who
In a sordid bargain
Has sold his mother
In ignominy market
For next to nothing !
The voice of the minaret,
And the Jerusalem church,
Is still in rebellion :
God is All-Great, too great
To bless this time of infancy,

Or to forgive the shame
And the ignominy !

* * *

Once upon a time
We had a homeland here —
A home, the colour of morning,
The colour of joy, beating
All sorrows, a beacon to all the world,
Establishing tolerance,
Giving guidance
And preaching peace.
On the bright meadows
Of this homeland green
The word of God was revealed
In the scriptures — and the Quran.
In every inch of the hallowed soil
History lingers and Time lives again.
The homeland had the colour of the morn

Extending the voice of the *muezzin*
From the Levant to the Sudan,
Gliding on the waters of Tigris,
And, in ecstasy, dances
On the hills of Lebanon,
Overlooking the olive groves in Baghdad,
Aleppo, and in Amman.
The eyes are Tigris and the Euphrates,
The wing-spread, thus all encompassing,
From the Arab Maghrib, to Aswan,
Reserves to Egypt the crown,
Where time was born,
Where the pyramids sang
An early hymn divine !
The heart, in Sinai beating,
Pumps the Nile blood,
A grandeur-crowned flood,
Whilst both banks bow to God.
It is a homeland-Mecca,
Life's holy *Kaaba*,

The home of truth,
The shrine of faith,
Which in her single-mindedness
Woke up the whole world,
Blazing the trail of greatness,
Taught the world martial arts,
And taught all men eloquence.

* * *

Such a beautiful homeland —
Once a homeland-Mecca —
Oh, what is left of it ?
The dogs now feed on it,
The blood the thirst of worms quenching,
The doves are all departed,
The ravens croak,
Swarms of locusts now wreak havoc,
And the rats run unchecked.
Water is poisoned,

Bread is poisoned
And the dream is poisoned.
Crucified on the walls
Is every break of day;
The joy-coloured homeland
Seems hoisted on a hearse of sorrows,
An emaciated body
In tenebrific frost
Shroudless on the cross.
A beautiful homeland,
Once a homeland-Mecca
Now sees manliness depart,
The knights falling,
In courts of cheap chicanery
The face of the truth is vanishing,
The hopes of a lifetime flounder
And the long procession of tyranny
Is now advancing !
In demesnes of long oppression
The voice of justice is lost,

The dawn song wanes,
And the call of falsehood reverberates.
The homeland had the colour of morning
Grand and vast in my eye
Though thin in this dark prison;
Bold and daring in my eye,
Though cowering in the garb
Of helplessness and oblivion;
Time-hallowed in my eye,
Though now you're a ruin,
Without a name, shapeless,
And without an address !
My home had the colour of morning
In any eye :
I now must save the face of my son,
When Saladdin has been crucified,
O homeland dear, on the walls !
What chest should harbour
The heart of my son
After the banishment of Saladdin,

From the eyes of the young,
And the crowning of Dayan ?
How humiliating it is if
That sword of glory drawn,
Should turn into a decoration !
How humiliating it is if Saladdin,
Now from Jerusalem banished,
Should seek in vain
A family lost, a house lost,
A homeland lost, and power lost !
Humiliation, O dear homeland,
Now reigns supreme !
Who could've taught the proud lion
To hold his head so low,
And make peace with the rats ?
Who could've taught the haughty stallion
Submissively to cringe
In the sheep procession ?
Who could've taught
The pious heart

To trade his godly devotion
For a worship of idols ?
Who could've taught
The homeland with a proud past,
To sell out her soldiers,
And barter the knights for boys ?
Who could've taught
My homeland sweet
To sell its soil so cheap ?
Who could've taught
The scimitar so bold
To hug his enemy
And hang martyrs in every square ?
O humiliated homeland
Of such guilt I wash my hands !
O times cowardly and tame
I wash my hands of your shame !
I wash my hands,
Wash my hands,
Wash my hands !



The Dream No Longer Enough

A tune am I,
From your lips flowing;
Quiet are the waves' whispers,
Becalmed are the winds' murmurs.
Beautiful birds in the firmament
Are on the wing,
And the tree-necks are silent.
Do you fly from the heart's quiver,
The tumult of desire,
And the light gushing
In the melancholy broken heart ?

* * *

A dream am I; are you averse
To the trysts of lovers
Where in the shadow of a dream
Desire dances,

With the lovely time promised ?
Do you regret the times that are lost ?
O life, who can the days past
Recover ? To cry is futile,
For nothing can bring again,
Nothing can beguile,
The moments shed in vain !

* * *

Such fear *am* I;
What *will* a lover do when,
A night-exile, he's driven
To the farthest horizon,
Pursued by a battallion
Of armed sorrows,
Then left, dismembered,
Among the ruins of a life-time ?
Which wound in the region
Of my heart did you awaken

As you now departed,
Now returned, thoughtlessly,
Whilst my poor wound broken,
Groaned, helplessly ?
Departure *am* I,
With you, in my eye,
On a perpetual journey !
Wasn't it my chord
That taught our world
How to play
The departure melody ?
Wasn't it the rhythm of my poetry
That did array
The departure prosody ?
Too long had I painted
In the mind's hinterland
A picture sweet
Of a life sweet,
Until I was turned,
Like everybody else

Into a waxen effigy !
At a cheap price sold,
With the slightest touch mauled !

* * *

A pain *am* I !
Nothing in the orchard is left
When the spring's departed :
The face of the earth
Looks old and wrinkled,
The bird's song is muted
The vibrant string is dead.
In the garden of love I paint
A thousand faces of meeting,
A thousand faces of departure,
And a thousand lamps
Which brightened life with desire
Radiating far and wide,
But committed suicide !

* * *

An anguish *am* I !
I do now know
That my sorrow,
Even as fog, rising,
Occludes the eye of the sun,
Fills the vault of heaven,
Blocks all vision.
In the desert vast of this world
Flowing, my being thins out —
By the wind scattered,
By the earth absorbed,
Then into rain is turned,
Destiny–showered !

* * *

An illusion *am* I,
A vesper, a song;
There was a wandering star
Which often followed me along,

But now in weariness gone west !
My dreams I penned out
On the face of the sun,
On signboards blank,
In city streets,
On babies' aprons, and,
Though still silent,
Taught the stones to talk :
What can I do when
The bitter times force me to drink
A cupful of sorrow ?
The new born hope in my eye peeps
But fails to see a morrow ?
As light in the eyes I left
But now am back, bereft,
Dream-intoxicated, shining,
But oft wary, waning, pining.

* * *

This is what I am, for ever
On this journey, passion driven,

With a heart riven,
A sailor's sail folded, broken,
A light on the brow of the earth, playing
A fire in the chest burning —
The flames of longing,
Now kindled, now flowing
In such tears shed,
Copiously bled,
On grass where the blades, sprouting,
Are soon blown by the wind
Into uncharted space
And couched by death
In tomb-locked silence.
The spirit still soars on high,
On my chest are mountains of ice,
The feet shackled in tons of iron,
And the yearning for departure,
Deep down, lives on.

* * *

This is what I am :
For all the raging tempest
The trees are sometimes at rest,
Sometimes, by the wind so shaken,
Are rain-drunken.
In your eyes I shall live one day
Enough to make me put the ugly times away,
And find purgation for the unwholesome body,
By dissolving in you,
Even if the solid, solid flesh should thaw;
A single day in your realm
Is my eternal dream,
And thence I make my pilgrimage,
Untroubled by men, by place or age.

Such Rainless Clouds

Deep down somewhere a wild stallion
Still gallops,
Now out of prison,
Out of the maze of the impossible realm
Where in a nightly dream
He had run
A thousand miles.
His green hoofs were battered,
The morning threads in his eyes frittered,
And the neighing stifled.
Caravans of chagrin
Have since then been marching
Up and down my valley
With a fountain of green blood gushing.
Since then has light been daily
From my eyes departing,
And the tall palm-trees, vanquished,
Did in consternation moan,

Though yet unbending.
The shadows still in the Nile blood
Seek intoxication!
Oh tell me how should morning come
And the beautiful times return
When you and I are but a cloud
That floats on high o'er homeland hills
Where it can see no daffodils !
Where could the dream be found
When shadows are dancing all round,
And in our blood
The arrows of tyranny dive
And the blades of coercion thrive ?
How could that morning rise
When the bleak night likes
To saunter in our bleeding eyes ?
How could we have a sunrise
When an executioner
Is in the children's nursery

Teaching them who must be killer
And who must victim be ?

* * *

Ask me not now
Where the good time is to be found
For I dislike all sorrow
Though each is a wound
Gnawing at my heart's marrow.
And since my dream betrayed,
All the love songs have dispersed
And life's suns have all been extinguished.
Even the pre-sunset hour has perished.
It is my destiny to live on ruins
Painting in the pitch black night
A lantern bright,
And a pallid dawn,
By life's melting candle sustained,
By an emaciated body.

I love you !
Whenever the threads of light
Escaped my eye,
I had you for a guide;
I love you !
Be not then a virgin night
Spent in my bosom,
Then rendered by separation homeless;
I love you !
Be not like everybody else
A covenant false,
Or a star lost
But hopes to find her way.
For the heart's anguish I had a remedy,
Planting in the desert
A thousand orchards, vast and shady.

* * *

In fear I come today,
As the same faces return

Like woodworms biting, eating their way
Into the very Nile bone !
The same faces,
Behind the windows
Are croacking crows,
And the howling grows.
The same faces
Are at the table devouring
A thin body.
The same faces
Peep above the black curtain
Disseminating their poison,
And in the ecstacy of joy
Our blood, staining their lips,
Gushes out and drips.
The same faces now storm the eyes
A nightmare in a heavy vision.
The same faces return
Chasing after us, like mice

While the executioner lies
In wait, in the long endless night.

* * *

Ask me not now about any good dream!
The morning I cannot blame
For having left our land;
No morning can accept
A servile existence
In a servile homeland.
The fire I cannot blame
If subdued and turned
Into a pride so lame,
In a sick body.
The river I cannot blame
If the banks go dry,
The plants awry,
And the palm-tree necks

Like uncertain sunrays
Broke in the eyes.

* * *

As long as the shadows imbibe
The blood of the Nile
For a potent wine
You cannot ask for a time fine.

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